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The World Parish Series
Edited by Elmer T. Clark

CENTRAL AMERICA

And What the Methodists Are Doing There

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Joint Division of Education and Cultivation
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In the present confused state of foreign affairs changes are constantly occurring, and this must be borne in mind in the interpretation and use of the material contained in any of the booklets of this series. The data have been checked and approved by the administrative secretaries and are regarded as approximately accurate as of May, 1941. Sources of information include the *Handbook of Methodist Missions* (prepared in mimeograph form for office use by the Foreign Divisions in 1940), *Year Book of The Board of Missions of The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1940, The Church and The World Parish,* by Elmer T. Clark, *World Almanac,* 1941, the various standard encyclopedias, missionary histories and atlases, and the records and correspondence of the Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church. Church statistics are from the *Minutes of The Annual Conferences* and are for 1939-40 unless otherwise stated. "F" or an asterisk (*) before or after the name of a missionary means "On furlough." "SF" means "Special furlough."

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica, most southerly Republic of Central America, is bounded by Nicaraugua, the Caribbean Sea, Colombia, and the Pacific Ocean. It became an independent state in 1821, and has had a constitution since 1871.

The area of Costa Rica is estimated at 23,000 square miles. Its population of 471,525 (1927) is made up almost entirely of white people of European descent, who live mainly in the larger towns of the uplands. The small number of Indians and Negroes remaining in Costa Rica live for the most part in the provinces bordering the Pacific. Spanish is the language of the country.

Compulsory and free elementary instruction is provided through 650 elementary schools with 65,000 pupils. Two secondary schools, one for boys and one for girls, enroll approximately 650 pupils. One normal school and two colleges provide higher education.

While under the constitution religious liberty is guaranteed, Roman Catholicism is the religion of the State.

Methodist Beginnings

Mr. Francisco G. Penzotti, a Methodist evangelist, visited Central America in 1886 on a preaching trip. In 1887 he became an agent of the American Bible Society and from 1892 to 1908 he was preaching and circulating the Bible throughout this area, and laying foundations for later evangelical advance. No definite organizational work emerged during this period.

In 1918 Rev. George A. Miller, then superintendent of Panama Mission and later bishop, visited San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, and placed Rev. Eduardo Zapata as pastor-in-charge. The first missionaries appointed were Rev. and Mrs. C. W. Ports.

At one time seven Methodist missionaries were serving in Costa Rica, but the last one left the field in 1932. Since that time the work has had relationship with the Board

through the missionaries in the Canal Zone; Costa Rica is included with Panama and the Canal Zone in the Central America Provisional Conference.

Five married couples and one unmarried woman, all na-

A Methodist family at Rio Sierpe, Costa, Rico

tives, now constitute the staff of workers in Costa Rica. An energetic program of evangelism and expansion is being carried on.

Institutions

San Jose

Colegio John Wesley. A new school, created by the native leadership on its own initiative in 1941, conducted in the Memorial Church. A Bible Training Department, 25 students, and a Preparatory School are in operation. There are four members of the faculty.

PANAMA AND THE CANAL ZONE

Panama seceded from Colombia and declared its independence in 1903. The independence was recognized by the United States immediately, but it was not until 1914 that Colombia recognized it. Diplomatic relations were not established until 1924.

By the Treaty of 1903 the United States was granted in perpetuity the use, occupation, and control of a zone five miles wide on each side of the route of the Panama Canal and the right to exercise sovereign power and authority therein. The cities of Panama and Colon remain under the authority of Panama except in the matters of health and sanitation. The Zone is, in effect, a government-owned reservation, no land being privately owned.

Panama is about 480 miles long and the width varies from 37 to 110 miles. The total area is 32,380 square miles The Republic has a population of about 470,000 of the most heterogeneous sort, whites, Indians, Negroes, Orientals, and mixed, the last named constituting half the population. There are 30,000 people in the Canal Zone, exclusive of the military and naval forces, 9,000 being Americans.

Elementary education is required. The government maintains 629 primary schools with 61,706 children enrolled (not counting the Canal Zone). Secondary schools had 3,-830 (1937) students. There are three secondary country schools, three agricultural schools, a normal school, a school of crafts and trades for boys, a professional school for young women, a college, and the National University (incorporated in 1935) in Panama City.

Roman Catholicism predominates outside the Canal Zone; Protestantism prevails within the Zone.

Methodist Beginnings

William Taylor's pioneering in Latin America (1877-1884) included Colon on the Isthmus of Panama, although in Taylor's time the Isthmus was part of Colombia. Also,

Mr. Francisco G. Penzotti, a Methodist evangelist, Italian born, who had been converted under Methodist missionaries in the La Plata region on the east coast, visited the Isthmus and Central America in 1886 on a preaching trip. In 1887, released by the Missionary Society, he became an agent of the American Bible Society for the Pacific Coast of South America. In 1890 he was imprisoned in Callao, Peru. After his release from an eight months' incarceration, he made a journey of exploration in Central America for eight months for the American Bible Society, and then visited New York City, where he was ordained a Meth-

A Conference group at one of the chapels in interior of Panama

odist deacon and elder. Mr. Penzotti returned to Central America and the Isthmus as agent of the American Bible Society, serving for eight years before being transferred to La Plata.

After Panama declared its independence in 1903 and the United States entered upon the canal project, the Canal Zone and its environs came to have new significance for the churches of the United States, and Methodist work was started in 1905 by Rev. J. C. Elkins. For eleven years it was administered as part of the North Andes Mission Conference. In 1916 it was set apart as a separate mission.

In 1921 the work in Panama and that in Costa Rica were united in the Central America Mission Conference. It is now called the Central America Provisional Annual Conference.

Institutions

Ancon, Canal Zone

Seawall School—a Co-educational elementary and secondary school with a commercial course; only school offering instruction in English; enrollment about 600.

Missionaries

Ancon, Canal Zone

Rev. Robert E. Eaker, Mission Superintendent for both Panama and Costa Rica
Mrs. Robert E. Eaker, District work
Miss Elizabeth D. Francis, Evangelistic work (F)
Miss Elsie J. Keyser, Seawall School
Mr. Walter Oliver, Director, Seawall School
Mrs. Walter Oliver, Seawall School

Status of the Church (1938)

Central America Provisional Annual Conference, including both Costa Rica and Panama.		Value	$36,460
Full members	400	Parsonages	3
Preparatory members	531	Value	$ 5,900
Pastoral charges	10	Church Schools	14
Local preachers	4	Enrolment	971
Church buildings	8	Ordained ministers	6
		Missionaries	6